

Message Text

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FOLG RECD AS BOMBAY 2185 DTD AUG 26 RPTD YOUR INFO
QUOTE

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAAGS: PFOR IN

SUBJ: RAJNI PATEL

REF A) NEW DELHI 11223; B) BOMBAY'S BIO-DATA FORM ON RAJNI
PATEL OF FEB 10, 1972

1. RAJNI PATEL HAS EMERGED IN RECENT MONTHS AS THE KEY FIGURE ON MAHARASHTRA'S POLITICAL SCENE, CURRENTLY OVERSHADOWING MAHARASHTRA'S LONG-TIME POLITICAL BOSS, FOM MIN Y.B. CHAVAN. UNLIKE Y.B. CHAVAN, HOWEVER, RAJNI DOES NOT HAVE AN INDEPENDENT POWER BASE OF HIS OWN, HIS POWER AND INFLUENCING DERIVING FROM HIS CLOSE PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH MRS GANDHI. OUR READING OF RAJNI, BASED ON COMMENTS MADE BY ALL WITH WHOM WE HAVE TALKED TO HERE REFLECTING BOTH RULING CONGRESS AND OPPOSITION SYMPATHIES, IS THAT RAJNI CURRENTLY STANDS HIGH IN MRS GANDHI'S ESTEEM AND FAVOR AND HAS BEEN IN CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH HER SINCE THE ADVENT OF THE EMERGENCY. OUR SOURCES WITHOUT EXCEPTION PLACE HIM AS ONE OF 3 OR 4 PERSONS CLOSEST TO HER AT PRESENT ARE OF THE OPINION THAT HIS INFLUENCE IS CONSIDERABLE. AS A TALENTED AND HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL LAWYER, IT IS THOUGHT THAT HIS VOICE HAS BEEN AN IMPORTANT ONE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGISLATIVE REFORMS AND MODIFICATIONS SUCH AS URBAN LAND LEGISLATION. WE ARE TOLD THAT WHILE IN DELHI, WHERE HE SPENDS MUCH OF HIS TIME THESE DAYS, HE OPERATES OUT OF THE ASKOKA HOTEL AND THAT CABINET
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MINISTERS COME TO SEE HIM RATHER THAN THE OTHER WAY ROUND, AND

THAT HE ONLY GOES OUT TO SEE THE PM AND PRESIDENT OF THE PARTY.

2. SINCE HIS POWER AND INFLUENCE DERIVE PRIMARILY FROM MRS GANDHI, AND, AS A GUJARATI, HE IS AN "OUTSIDER" IN MAHARASHTRA'S POLITICAL WORLD, RAJNI'S POSITION IS A VULNERABLE ONE. HIS FORTUNES CAN RISE WITH MRS GANDHI OR FALL IF SHE CHOOSES TO SEVER THE CLOSE LINK WHICH SHE PRESENTLY HAS WITH HIM. AS FAR AS WE CAN TELL, SHE REPOSES CONFIDENCE AND TRUST IN RAJNI, ADMIRES HIS DRIVE, AND APPARENTLY HAS NO PROBLEM WITH HIS RADICAL OR LEFTIST ORIENTATION AND LINKS. RAJNI IS A COMMANDING AND FORCEFUL FIGURE - MOST UNLIKE THE USUAL CONGRESS POLITICIAN, CAN BE CHARMING AND SOPHISTICATED - A CONSIDERABLE CUT ABOVE HIS MORE EARTHY AND AT TIMES CRUDE FRIEND BLITZ EDITOR KARANJIA, AND IT IS QUITE LIKELY THAT IN ADDITION TO HIS OTHER QUALIFICATIONS, RAJNI MAY HAVE A CERTAIN MASCULINE APPEAL TO MRS GANDHI AS WELL. HE HAS ALSO BEEN REGARDED AS ONE OF THE RULING CONGRESS' MOST EFFECTIVE FUND RAISERS.

3. INSOFAR AS WE CAN DETERMINE, RAJNI'S TIE WITH MRS GANDHI IS OF FAIRLY RECENT ORIGIN AND ONE THAT HAS DEVELOPED PRIMARILY SINCE RAJNI'S ENTRY INTO THE RULING CONGRESS IN DECEMBER, 1969, IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE CONGRESS SPLIT. THAT RAJNI IMPRESSED MRS GANDHI FOLLOWING HIS ENTRY INTO THE CONGRESS, IS REFLECTED IN HER NOMINATION OF HIM TO ASSUME THE PRESIDENCY OF THE BOMBAY PCC IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE STATE ELECTIONS IN 1972. BY THAT TIME, HE HAD COME TO BE VIEWED AS HER "PROTEGE". MORE RECENTLY, HE HAS COME TO BE VIEWED IN EFFECT AS MRS GANDHI'S PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVE AS A RESULT OF HER USE OF HIM RATHER THAN Y.B. CHAVAN TO EFFECT THE CHANGE OVER OF CHIEF MINISTERS IN MAHARASHTRA THIS PAST SPRING, EARNING FOR HIMSELF THE TITLE OF "KINGMAKER".

4. RAJNI IS A GUJARATI (BORN IN KAIRA DISTRICT) ALTHOUGH A RESIDENT OF BOMBAY SINCE ABOUT 1948; A HINDU PATIDAR (WELL-TO-DO FARMERS); AND ATTAINS AGE 60 THIS YEAR (BORN 1915). AS A GUJARATI HIS HORIZONS IN MAHARASHTRIAN POLITICS ARE NECESSARILY LIMITED IN TERMS OF HOLDING KEY OFFICE NOR IS THERE ANY EVIDENCE TO SUGGEST THAT HE ASPIRES TO HIGH POLITICAL OFFICE IN THIS STATE. HIS PROFESSED PREFERENCE THUS FAR HAS BEEN TO PLAY A BEHIND-THE-SCENES ROLE AND TO FAVOR THIS OVER A PORTFOLIO

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IN THE UNION CABINET.

5. HE STUDIED AT FERGUSSON COLLEGE, POONA, AND AT CAMBRIDGE. HE TOOK AN M.A. IN ECONOMICS STUDIED FOR AND WAS ADMITTED TO THE BAR. HE IS A PROMINENT AND HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL LAWYER IN BOMBAY AND IS SUPPOSED TO HAVE AN EXTREMELY LUCRATIVE PRACTICE. WE HAVE NOTHING TO SUGGEST OR CONFIRM THAT HIS ACQUAINTANCE WITH MRS GANDHI BEGAN WHILE HE WAS A STUDENT IN THE UK IN

THE 1930S, ALTHOUGH WE ARE AWARE THAT THIS IS AN IMPRESSION WHICH HAS GAINED SOME CURRENCY. WE DISCOUNT IT.

6. WHETHER RAJNI'S FRIENDSHIP WITH MRS GANDHI DATES BACK TO STUDENT DAYS OR NOT, THE RECORD IS QUITE CLEAR THAT THEIR RELATIONSHIP HAS BEEN A CLOSE ONE SINCE 1970. MRS GANDHI'S SELECTION OF HIM TO BE PRESIDENT OF THE BPCC IN 1972 WAS INTENDED TO PROJECT A MORE RADICAL AND DYNAMIC IMAGE TO THE CONGRESS PARTY IN URBAN BOMBAY AND TO CHALLENGE THE INFLUENCE OF FORMER CONGRESS LEADERS LIKE S.K. PATIL. IN THE PROCESS THE BPCC WAS INTENDED TO OFFSET IN SOME MEASURE THE MPCC WHICH IS DOMINATED BY VESTED AGRICULTURAL AND CONSERVATIVE INTERESTS. IT WAS ALSO CONTEMPLATED THAT EX-CPI MEMBER RAJNI PATEL WOULD BE ABLE TO OBTAIN THE SUPPORT OF LEFTIST ELEMENTS INCLUDING THE CPI FOR THE CONGRESS PARTY. THE MPCC, FOR ITS PART, TAKES A DIM VIEW OF THE BPCC AND ITS LEFT-WING ORIENTATION AND WOULD LIKE TO ELIMINATE IT IF IT COULD BUT HAS LITTLE PRESENT PROSPECT OF DOING SO.

7. RAJNI'S INCREASING POWER AND INFLUENCE IN MAHARASHTRIAN POLITICS HAS NOT BEEN ACCEPTED BY A SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER OF MORE CONSERVATIVE RULING CONGRESS MEMBERS IN MAHARASHTRA WHO VIEW HIM AS AN OUTSIDER, A COMMUNIST AND ONE WHO IS UNLIKELY TO BE SYMPATHETIC TO THEIR INTERESTS. WHILE THEY ACCEPT HIM AND RECOGNIZE THAT HE FOR THE PRESENT AT LEAST HAS THE INSIDE TRACK WITH MRS GANDHI, THEY DO NOT CARE FOR HIM BUT ARE NOT OF COURSE PREPARED TO CHALLENGE HIM.

8. RAJNI PLAYED A KEY ROLE EARLIER THIS YEAR IN THE OUSTER OF MAHARASHTRA'S LONG-TIME CONSERVATIVE CHIEF MIN NAIK (A LONG-TIME TARGET OF CPI AND THE LEFT HERE), AND IN THE SELECTION OF HIS SUCCESSOR, S.B. CHAVAN, AND THE MEMBERS OF HIS CABINET. MANY OF THE MEETINGS BETWEEN CENTRE AND LOCAL POLITICAL PERSONALITIES WERE HELD IN RAJNI'S PRESENCE AND IN HIS ROOM DURING THE CHANGE-
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OVER. HE WAS VIEWED LOCALLY AS REPRESENTING MRS GANDHI THROUGHOUT THIS OPERATION. SIGNIFICANT WAS MRS GANDHI'S BYPASSING OF Y.B. CHAVAN AND HER USE OF RAJNI AS A MEDIUM TO EFFECT THIS CHANGEOVER. MORE RECENTLY HE PARTICIPATED ACTIVELY IN MRS GANDHI'S UNSUCCESSFUL ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN IN GUJURAT AND WORKED CLOSELY WITH HER. SINCE JUNE 26, HE HAS SPENT MUCH OF HIS TIME IN DELHI WORKING ON MATTERS FOR HER.

9. WHILE HE LACKS A SUBSTANTIAL POWER BASE OF HIS OWN, RAJNI HAS CERTAIN ACHIEVEMENTS TO HIS CREDIT IN BOMBAY. HE IS REGARDED LOCALLY AS THE KEY FUND RAISER FOR THE RULING CONGRESS PARTY. WE ARE TOLD THAT HE IS HIGHLY PERSUASIVE AND CAPABLE OF EFFECTIVE ARM-TWISTING IN CASES WHERE PROSPECTIVE DONORS APPEAR TO BE RELUCTANT. HE HAS ALSO BEEN A PRINCIPAL ARCHITECT OF POLICY OF WINNING SIV SENA SUPPORT FOR THE CONGRESS

PARTY IN BOMBAY IN RECENT YEARS. (SIV SENA IS CURRENTLY SUPPORT-
ING MRS GANDHI). RAJNI PLAYS A PROMINENT ROLE IN BOMBAY LABOR
AFFAIRS. HE IS THE PRESIDENT OF THE RMMS TEXTILE WORKERS
UNION WHICH FOLLOWS THE GOI LINE. HE IS ALSO PRESIDENT
OF THE INDIAN OIL OFFICERS' ASSOCIATION WHICH THIS PAST WEEK
REELECTED HIM FOR THE SIXTH TIME AND PLEDGED ITS
"UNSTINTED AND WHOLEHEARTED SUPPORT TO PM."

10. RAJNI FALLS ON THE FAR LEFT OF THE RULING CONGRESS POLITICAL
SPECTRUM. HE IS A ONE-TIME MEMBER OF THE CPI AND WAS A
CPI ACTIVIST DURING THE 1940'S AND 1950'S. BETWEEN THE LATE
1950'S-WHEN HE IS UNDERSTOOD TO HAVE SEVERED HIS TIE WITH
THE CPI - AND UNTIL HE JOINED THE CONGRESS IN 1969, HE WAS
WHAT WE WOULD HAVE CALLED IN THOSE DAYS A "FELLOW TRAVELER."
HE WAS CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH KRISHNA MENON AND TOOK IN MORE
RECENT YEARS AN ACTIVE PART IN THE BOMBAY ISCUS, HOLDING THE
OFFICE OF PRESIDENT WHICH HE DOES TODAY. WHILE HE HAS
SEVERED HIS EARLIER TIES WITH THE CPI, HIS RELATIONS WITH
THE PARTY APPEAR TO BE CLOSE. HE HAS SAID THAT HE CONSIDERS
CPI HEAD DANGE TO BE HIS GURU. BLITZ EDITOR KARANJIA IS
ONE OF HIS CLOSE FRIENDS AND ASSOCIATES. RAJNI HAS BEEN A
MEMBER OF THE BLITZ NATIONAL FORUM FOR YEARS.

11. RAJNI VISITED THE US IN 1939-40 ON A LECTURE TOUR UNDER THE
AUSPICES OF THE AMERICAN YOUTH CONGRESS AND ALWAYS SPEAKS
FAVORABLY OF HIS VISIT AND THE FRIENDS HE MET WHILE THERE.
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12. COMMENT: IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR US TO MEASURE THE EXTENT
TO WHICH RAJNI "INFLUENCES" MRS GANDHI. TO THE EXTENT THAT HE
DOES WE WOULD THINK THAT IT WOULD BE THROUGH THEIR POSSIBLE
COMMON ATTACHMENT TO SOCIALIST DOCTRINES AND DOGMAS AND A
SHARING OF A PERCEPTION AS TO HOW BEST TO BETTER THE LIFE OF
INDIA'S MASSES. RAJNI, IN OUR VIEW, IS COMMITTED TO THE LEFT
AND THE CPI AND TO THAT EXTENT REPRESENTS AN UNFORTUNATE INFLUENCE
FROM OUR STANDPOINT TO THE EXTENT THAT HE IS ACTUALLY ABLE TO
PROJECT IT. HIS POSITION, HOWEVER, IS A VULNERABLE ONE SINCE
HIS POWER AND INFLUENCE DERIVE PRIMARILY FROM MRS GANDHI AND SO MUCH
WILL DEPEND UPON HER LONGER TERM VIEW OF INDIA'S ORIENTATION.
THE RULING CONGRESS' MORE CONSERVATIVE MEMBERS - OF WHICH
THERE ARE MANY IN MAHARASHTRA - HAVE NO USE FOR RAJNI AND IF
THEY GET THE CHANCE OR SHOULD HE FALL FROM MRS GANDHI'S
FAVOR, HE COULD BECOME A "HAS BEEN" PRETTY QUICKLY.
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